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ABSTRACT

This article presents an interview with Don Holdaway, early childhood educator and originator of "shared book experience." The article first provides a brief summary of themes embodied in Holdaway's first book, "The Foundations of Literacy." It then presents the interview with Holdaway, discussing literacy learning, big books, and Holdaway's acquisition model of learning. The interview also touches on the importance of children becoming risk takers if they are to enter into the problem solving behavior which learning to read entails, and discusses the need for children to be helped to develop self-correction or self-regulatory behaviors, their most important resource in becoming autonomous literacy learners. (SR)

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BIG BOOKS REVISITED

An Interview with Don Holdaway

PRIMARY ENGLISH TEACHING ASSOCIATION

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PRIMARY ENGLISH TEACHING ASSOCIATION

Don Holdaway, originally from New Zealand and now resident in Australia, is rightly regarded as the 'father' of shared book experience. His book *The Foundations of Literacy* was first published in 1979, and yet the insights it provides into literacy learning remain as fresh as if it had been published this year. We thought it was time, now that more than a decade has passed, to ask Don Holdaway how he views the 'big book' movement today, and he kindly consented to an interview with Vivienne Nicoll-Hatton.

INTRODUCTION

Don Holdaway is a fascinating educator who does not attempt to reduce learning and teaching to a series of simple slogans, but who reveals their complexity in a lucid and comprehensible manner. Interviewing him was a challenging experience (he does not suffer foolish questions gladly) but a refreshing one. Our discussions ranged widely, and focused particularly upon the theoretical underpinnings of shared book experience. In discussion Holdaway demonstrated his open-mindedness in the face of recent developments in the literacy field, the breadth and relevance of his knowledge, and above all a passion and commitment to children and their autonomy as learners which is rare today.

Many teachers who successfully use the shared book approach in their classrooms may never have had cause to read Holdaway's *The Foundations of Literacy*, since his ideas have been incorporated into most state curriculum documents, teacher education courses, and inservice courses such as ELIC (Early Literacy Inservice Course). So we thought we might preface this interview with a brief summary of the themes embodied in his first book.

Don Holdaway wrote *The Foundations of Literacy* after years of teaching Maori and other Polynesian children in rural and inner-city schools. These children, with a culture quite different from that of the school, were often regarded as failures when it came to learning to read and write. Holdaway recognised that, for them, traditional literacy learning was punitive. He took as his model of successful language learning the way very young children learn spoken language through interaction with their parents. He describes this social learning model as *acquisition learning*, and it featured largely in our discussions. One characteristic of the model is that literacy learning can and must be a positive and intrinsically rewarding experience — even a joyous one. However, this does not mean that the teacher's role can be reduced to providing a 'warm and fuzzy' environment, as both this interview and all Holdaway's writing makes clear. The teacher's role, as he sees it, is a most demanding and rigorous one, involving a sound theoretical base and great skill.

To the acquisition learning model Holdaway added understandings gleaned from his own and others' research into literacy learning in early childhood. He noted in particular the importance of family story-reading time. Parents, he observed, read to their children not primarily to instruct but to give pleasure, and they found the experience a rewarding one. Children found this shared reading 'among the happiest and most secure' of their experiences. The stories read were 'enriching and deeply satisfying', and so children developed 'strongly positive associations with the flow of story language and with the physical characteristics of books'. Holdaway looked more closely at the cycle of behaviours typical of bedtime storybook sharing time, and from this and his knowledge of spoken language learning, he developed a teaching strategy which could be used with a class of young children. Thus 'shared book experience' was born.

Holdaway and his New Zealand colleagues developed a cycle of teaching and learning activities for developing children's literacy competencies during the first few years of school. That cycle, particularly the daily input session with its predictable structure, should be very familiar to those teachers who regularly use shared book experience. However, it is possible that many of them (for instance, those who learned of the procedure 'second-hand' through teaching manuals) are not aware of the thinking and research that lie behind what appears to be a very simple classroom routine.

Obviously shared book experience involves the teacher in the selection (and sometimes production) of texts to share in an enlarged format. The widespread adoption of

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the shared book strategy, not only in New Zealand and Australia but also in North America and Great Britain, has led to a big book publishing boom. There are now hundreds of big books in print, some being enlarged versions of previously published literature, some purpose-written for commercial reading programs. It is not surprising that Holdaway should be critical of some of this material. His thoughts on the teacher's role in selecting material of good quality (which means becoming less reliant on published big books) are particularly pertinent.

The interview which follows touches on a number of other themes in Holdaway's model of literacy learning. One is the importance of children becoming risk takers if they are to enter into the problem solving behaviour, the hypothesis/test/confirm strategy, which learning to read entails (though Holdaway makes it very clear that risk taking can only be successful when the teacher provides a 'safety net' underneath the young learner). Another important theme is the need for children to be helped to develop self-correction or self-regulatory behaviours, probably their most important resource in becoming autonomous literacy learners.

V. N-H.

THE INTERVIEW

What aspects of your thinking from 1979 do you think have been most successfully applied to literacy learning? And which have been least heeded and need reiteration?

Wow! Where do we start? I may need your help in focusing on particular features. The movement is so complex and still very much in development, and I've been working in four countries where the ideas have impacted differently in response to very different educational and cultural situations and timings.

I'd be both ungracious and dishonest if I denied the tremendous satisfaction of being part of such an emancipating movement in early schooling around the world. As a prophet in my own land until 1975, I was unaccountably blessed with acceptance and colleagueship of wonderful depth, and New Zealand schools remain a remarkable testimony to the power of these ideas operating in a diverse consensus. Both Australian and Canadian teachers made their own early synthesis in brave and determined ways, and are pushing on to maturing theory both in classrooms and in the academic community. In the United States — that great melting pot of cultures now bordering on the denial of its own children — the ideas provide a foundation in knowledge for the transformation of schooling and the protection of children within a context of stress and conflict unknown in intensity elsewhere in the world. At this level — the power of the ideas to provide alternative strategies for doing things in schooling — it is deeply gratifying that we have been able to make a case for alternative, socially cooperative strategies, based on compelling research, grounded in sane theory, and established within the competence and commitment of thousands of grass-roots teachers.

However, also at this level, I'd like to get really retrospective. In the beginnings of the movement, even in a country like New Zealand where literacy standards were comparatively high, the movement was driven by a demand for efficiency and rigour rather than by concerns of a humanitarian nature. It was driven by a realistic appraisal of the inefficiencies and injustices of traditional literacy teaching — to the point of honest shame and disgust. We wanted to find more efficient and just alternatives.

The movement was centred on rigour. A soft interpretation of what we now call 'whole language' properly emphasises the *joy* of meaningful learning (as I myself have been noted for expounding), but this feature of the paradigm may be more a gracious accident than a central tenet. It's certainly a blessing that to teach most efficiently demands a humane environment, but the humane environment alone doesn't guarantee the efficiency. Our first responsibility as professionals was to determine with great detail and precision those strategies of teaching which led to success in becoming literate, and to try to explain why this was so in each case.

'The shared book movement was centred on rigour.'

I guess it's here that the problems are seen to be technical, and many teachers responded to your work in that way — you gave them ideas for getting on with the job. And they had a lot of fun and success in doing so. Well, how do you feel about our success at this level?

Well, there are many misunderstandings about so-called 'shared book experience' which have worried me for many years — and still do — particularly when they are attributed to me. We had compelling theoretical and research reasons for establishing a new technology of literacy teaching; we weren't just advocating having a good time. We weren't just concerned with the charm of lovely big books — look, we had forceful reasons for advocating the use of big books.

For one thing, we wanted a style of teaching which allowed all children to enjoy and cope with a challenging, ungraded, open literature at the centre of their instruction, and which was supported by those principles of text repetition producing 'favourite texts' suggested by the emergent literacy research.

For another, we wanted print itself to be the focus of attention, and for this attention to be universal and under the control of the teacher. We wanted to teach phonics in context.

We wanted a situation which was cooperative and supportive rather than competitive and corrective.

We wanted to build a culture of trust and desire for written texts, a 'literacy club' from which no child was excluded.

We wanted to use a literature so powerful that it would

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generate writing and every other form of real literate activity, including genuine publishing and book-making.

We wanted every child to have an extensive inventory of text so familiar and loved that it would be a lifetime resource for all manner of literate preoccupations.

I could go on, but my point is that when you go through those underlying principles, you see that each implies more than just using big books.

Yes, I see what you mean. I believe there may be more than eight hundred commercially published big books available to schools now. Do you have any opinion on the quality of published big books?

For the first ten years we made all our own big books, often with the children, and we've lost much in control of choice and in pupil participation by relying too much on the published corpus. Although there've been some marvellous creations, the quality of published big books varies tremendously, and we've tended to lose that first priority of being able to choose the most powerful literature in print as the centre of our literacy program. For all sorts of reasons, the wonderful literature already in print has seldom been used in the big book publishing binge, even though in my first publishing ventures with Ashton Scholastic in the early seventies I tried to establish that principle. Teachers still need to enlarge texts from the open literature.

Elsewhere you've mentioned other strategies for producing enlarged texts. Isn't it possible now to use a wider technology to produce suitable materials for shared book experience?

Most definitely. When I first worked in the States, where there was a dearth of published big books and some unwillingness to make them, I used three forms of projection — opaque (with which you could project almost any text in print, provided the room was dark enough); the slide projector (which gave wonderful images, and great opportunities for shadow pointing and masking); and, most importantly, the common old overhead projector (which is so versatile in undarkened settings).

So you'd recommend an overhead projector in every classroom then?

Well, yes, especially now that transparencies can be made so quickly and cheaply on modern copiers. Particularly with older children, you can select parts of a text to use with various forms of cloze procedure, like progressive exposure, to enhance the technical impact and precision of your teaching.

Much of your work about the techniques of literacy teaching has emphasised the different social roles *that teachers need to take up to guide children towards a full mastery of literacy. I suppose you have all that in mind too when you consider the efficiency of shared book experience as it's practised in schools.*

Very much so. When we began working towards a new paradigm in the late sixties, the most accessible theoretical models came from psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology — both of which were in experimental conflict with the prevailing behaviourism. The hypothesis/test model turned traditional pedagogy on its head. Far from emphasising right responses and correction as the central responsibility of the teacher, it invited problem solving and risk taking, while passing the responsibility for checking and correction back to where it belongs — with the learner. These insights were powerfully supported by the early work of Dr Marie Clay. That emphasis on self-correction and what Marie calls 'the self-improving system' remains the backbone of the new paradigm.

But what do these processes of inducing learners to take responsibility for themselves look like when they're applied on a classroom floor? We found ourselves driven back, in all humility, to the observation of actual efficient learning as exemplified in the acquisition of spoken language during infancy, and to the apparent miracles of emergent literacy and the early mastery of other complex developmental tasks. You see, the wonderful successes of human learning are generated in powerful *social* settings. What we are centrally concerned with is that facility of human beings to communicate highly complex processes to their young. And it boils down to relationships — how do those with skill relate to and communicate with those without it?

'The wonderful successes of human learning are generated in powerful social settings.'

The sociolinguists talk about 'expert' and 'apprentice'.

Yes, okay. You might include parent, friend, peer, club member, role-model, and so on. All of that terminology, that's fine. And that situation — skilled faces unskilled — provides the answers to some of the classic problems that traditional teaching has always presented us with. How do you interest kids? What is motivation? Where does it come from? Why do kids work so hard on speech or on riding a bike? Well, in the sixties, the linguists identified this sort of inexplicably efficient learning, such as is seen in learning to speak, as 'acquisition'. They wanted to distinguish it from the sort of stuff that goes on in schools and is prescribed in curricula — the sort of stuff that has to be *taught*.

And you're ascribing successful literacy learning to this 'acquisition' model — and saying you can do it in schools.

Exactly. If you want to put the new paradigm of so-called 'whole language' in a nutshell, what we are concerned with is creating the conditions for acquisition learning on the classroom floor.

I can see now why you emphasise social, relational and interactional matters so strongly in your work — because the model is primarily a social one, isn't it?

That's right. It starts, it's generated in the beginning by a relationship of *bonding*; there's something special between the skilled person and the apprentice (or the unskilled person) — the teacher and the child. They're in a relationship where bonding has made the unskilled person (the learner) very interested in what the other person's doing. Whether it's because they love them or admire them or

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are just plain fascinated with them — any form of bond makes them look carefully at what that social creature is up to, with a tremendous feeling that *they want to be like that*. It's an emulative thing, and it doesn't occur without bonding.

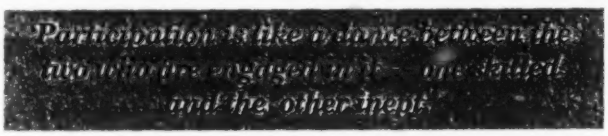
So bonding is something that we have to deal with, though we haven't got time to more than touch on it now. It's the type of relationship which occurs naturally with a good teacher: she is really fascinating to kids *in that way* (and you can sentimentalise it by saying that they love her or anything like that if you want to), but there's certainly a fascination with her, and a trust, and a comfortable familiarity — all of those things go with bonding. And as soon as a bond has occurred, the unskilled person observes in a *heightened* form of observation. One of the earliest instances of this that I watched in my own kids was sweeping the floor, handling a broom. Now, the mother in both the cases I studied *hated* sweeping, but it was an essential functional part of her social behaviour, and just because she was bonded to the baby, the baby was fascinated by the sweeping, okay? The mother's behaviour took on the status of a demonstration.

All of those things about bonding are involved in what I'm calling *demonstration* — it's not in any way a setting out of a procedure to interest the child, or to instruct — it's doing what you genuinely do in the most authentic way. We can rely on the bond to produce the observation, which will in turn produce some detailed information about *how to do it*. Now, as soon as a demonstration has worked, there's a closing of the gap between the learner and the skilled person: the learner tends to approach whatever skill is being demonstrated and wants to get into the act. And the skilled person becomes aware that she's being watched, that there's this special interest, and she cooperates and participates with that desire to have hands-on experience.

So the teacher begins to play a new role. She was a demonstrator — now she's a participant. She takes the hands of the child and together they sweep, or together they do this, or together they do that, and her skill becomes a solid basis which guides the process through to its accomplishment, much to the learner's satisfaction. The child or the learner is unable to do it at the beginning, is completely inept and clumsy, but because of participant support, the act always comes to a satisfactory social end. Under those circumstances you can't say who is totally in charge, because in true participation the learner has to be able to take some of the initiative. So that's different from demonstration, which is passive for the learner in the sense that it's just the sheer *skill* of the skilled person that attracts attention. But participation is like a dance between the two who are engaged in it — one skilled and the other inept! It is these two parts of the process not represented clearly in traditional teaching — demonstration and participation — which form the framework of shared reading and shared writing.

Out of the two experiences comes enough information about how to do whatever it is for learners to take independent action — they want to practise it and get it right for themselves. And as soon as they can find the appropriate private opportunity, they'll get hold of the artefact, whether it be a broom or a pencil or a book, and they'll have a go. They'll prefer that there be no audience as they engage in this reflexive activity. (There I'm using an obscure term out of habit. By 'reflexive' I mean acting without an audience, or being one's own observer and critic. Successful acquisition learners use this human strategy of making oneself into two people — both the performer and the observer.)

The teacher figure at this point becomes to all intents and purposes *invisible*, in the sense that it's best that the skilled person not be an auditor or an audience of what's going on. Skilled figures do provide the security within the environment — the sense that the safe world is going on because they are near or within cooee. They can be present in the environment but it's not a performance being done *for* them — they're not watching. That's why this phase had never been studied very well, because it's one of the things that adults think are irrelevant, you see, and it's the irrelevance that's so beautiful about it, because it allows the learner an opportunity to have a go — like a teenager learning to put on her make-up. (I've got one here who's twelve and she's right in the middle of it now. She spends hours locked away in front of the mirror. It'd be quite intolerable if there were any adult watching — or anyone else for that matter.) This is what I call 'role-playing', and it only operates when there's no-one in the environment acting as an audience. A room in which everyone's busy with their own concerns will do as well as a bathroom.



That's very hard for a teacher — to be there but not be there!

Yes, but it's a very natural, supportive social function. One of the first studies of children who were literate before going to school (Margaret Clark's work) found that the one feature that all of those adult-child relationships had in common was that the kids *trusted* the skilled person to answer their questions directly without criticism, and the skilled person answered their questions directly and without instruction. That is, if the kid said, 'What's this word?' or 'How do you spell such and such?', out it came and the adults went on with what they were doing, but they didn't become involved in an instructional act. Most importantly, the adults didn't invade that reflexive time by being audience or critic — they were simply *available*.

That's just the sort of relationship a teacher sets up in a writing process lesson where the children are all busy writing their own things and she's available as a facilitator.

Okay! But now I want to get on to the exciting culmination of all this. Let's get back to the girl in the bathroom. She'll soon come out and show off, displaying some new cosmetic arrangement, even with a flounce. So, after this period of reflexive activity where the teacher is most passive, the learner storms out to display her new-found competence, especially to that important bonded adult. Her confidence is based on the preceding self-evaluation

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in the bathroom, but she still seeks that vital *validation* which can only come in full force from the bonded one or those with mature skill. *She* is now the performer.

So in the sense of audience and performer we've come full circle. At each step the teacher is playing a different role within the relationship.

This is why it's necessary to understand each of these modes of relationship intimately, and to be able to step into them fully at the right time. None of the roles represents the way that the teacher should act *all the time.*

You've just touched on a couple of questions I'd wanted to raise — in particular, when is it most appropriate for the classroom teacher to monitor, or even to correct?

The most natural time for evaluating and for sensitive criticism arises after the preparation of role-playing culminates in the learner's *invitation* to be judged which is implied by self-motivated performing. The learner, having practised in this private way, is overwhelmed with the need to socialise — to use the skill, to display it, to perform it, to show off, to be noticed, to be accepted, and so on. So she rushes out and says, 'Oh Mum, look at this! I can do it! What do you think?' But that won't occur unless the reflexive behaviour has occurred beforehand — or at least, it won't occur in the right way, in a way which crystallises the learning, makes it memorable, personal and unforgettable. It must come through the reflexive mode into the performance mode, okay? So, in this last act of performance, the roles of teacher and child (the skilled person and the unskilled person) have been reversed, in that the one performing is the learner and the one 'auding' or being an audience, and watching and making comment or criticism, is the teacher. It's at this point that her criticism will be acceptable to the learner. At this point you can be very precise and honest about your evaluation of what the kid's done, because it's something she's wanted to perform. But always it must be a validation too.

(A side point I might make here, going back to my comments about rigour, is that process teaching doesn't belittle performance or excellence — on the contrary, it induces efficient performance in the most powerful ways without demanding it or invasively testing for it.)

Each of these modes is socially and psychologically very, very different. So a good teacher has to be this multifunctional person with control of all of these processes — social, interactional processes. To be a good demonstrator, you need to be *absolutely* the centre of attention — in a way that you don't even have to ask for it because you're so powerful — but in the third mode, in the reflexive mode, you've got to 'disappear'. If you get used to being a powerful demonstrator, it's difficult not to override the kids all of the time and just overawe them with your own skill. Now, fortunately, in the most natural acquisition situations, like in learning to speak or walk, or to ride a bicycle or any of those things, everybody with skill is so busy doing their own thing that there's loads of room for the different modes to develop adequately, particularly the reflexive, private mode. Parents just don't have the time to watch their kids constantly, and those few parents who are so wrapped up in their kids that they do, ruin the hell out of their kids. You destroy the learning ability of your kids if you hang over them all the time. This tends to be the way that American teachers have been trained — they are 'hoverers' over the kids all the time. They've got to know everything that's going on, all the time, and they take away the initiative and the risk taking that goes on with kids really learning.

'You destroy the learning ability of your kids if you hang over them all the time.'

There's a certain guilt among some teachers that if they're not 'teaching' the whole time then the kids aren't learning.

That's right. But if you can understand that *one* of your roles is to produce this reflexive mode, you can feel fulfilled in what you're doing, because you know that's a fundamental part of your program. So the teacher is both a tremendously powerful influence in the environment as the skilled person and the demonstrator, and she's also this very non-interventionist supporter at the appropriate times when reflexive behaviour is undertaken by the learner.

In traditional teaching that mode hasn't even been allowed. It hasn't been tolerated. We expect to do the formal teaching and then have the performance straight away and then we criticise the performance and correct it, which replaces the reflexive self-correction by an intrusive external correction and turns the whole learning act upside down into something perverse and destructive. If it's persisted in and learners aren't allowed to develop their own self-counsel and risk taking and that sort of thing, then they become very dependent. It becomes very clear when you get into remedial work that this is the outstanding psychological characteristic of the kids: they can't do anything on their own.

Learned helplessness . . .

They're looking up into your face all the time! One of the things I had to say in my early clinical work was, 'Don't look at my face, you won't find it there! It's on the page — now have another look at that,' and get them to be confident that it's the *text* that has the information, not you, because that's what they've mis-learned after four or five years of failure . . .

They've been corrected all the time . . .

Yes, they feel that they can't do that for themselves.

Can you elaborate a little more on this concept of self-correction? It seems to be to be crucial to all your work, and you've mentioned it a couple of times already.

Well, one of the distinctive insights of Marie Clay's work, right from the beginning, was the way she was able to show from the data that complex learning, such as early reading experience, is a process of constantly gaining insight and integration *through errors.* This was a little shocking because it was occurring when the behaviourists

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were talking about teaching in 'error-free' ways. The ideal of learning was a paradigm in which you would present things to kids in such a way that they didn't make any mistakes in the beginning, because to go on making a mistake was to 'inbuild' it and all the rest of it. There's a certain truth in that latter part, but nevertheless . . .

The errors were frowned upon . . .

Yes, and as Marie's work has shown us, errors are not only fruitful, but they are the most fruitful, and in some respects the *only* fruitful path to competence. What's important is the recognition that comes out of the error, the impetus to make advances — to see what's gone wrong, to put it right and not to make the same mistake again. This of course fits into the acquisition model beautifully. It's an explanation of how the principle of *approximation* works in literacy, and again, traditionally, the notion of approximation and the working for approximation was not a very popular idea. Teachers like the answers to be right!

And so Marie's work showed that the finesse in learning comes through becoming more and more skilled at processing your own errors. It's a process of gradual approximation in which errors are the positive source of your knowledge and you're not afraid of going ahead, taking risks and making errors. You know that the course to understanding and competence is going to be through making errors, understanding what's gone wrong, and then taking control and correcting it, so that from then on that's something that you've grasped for yourself. But this is something which is almost impossible to teach in any direct way. You can't tell people how to learn from their errors. It's a process by which the way in which the error is handled by the individual is perceived as a positive route to understand what's gone wrong.

'Finesse in learning comes through becoming more and more skilled at processing your own errors.'

But you can demonstrate it, can't you?

You can demonstrate it, but it's not one of those things that can be taught in any directive sense, in the traditional mode of 'to teach'.

Can it be induced?

It can be induced, yes, but there's no way the teacher can *do* it for the pupil, or even pre-digest it in any fundamental sense. There are ways of 'scaffolding' it so that it's much more likely to occur — and Marie's work, of course, says much about scaffolding learning — yet it's not in any sense an attempt to directly dominate or control the learner, but to induce the learner to take control so that he or she discovers that errors are not things to be frightened of and to try to avoid at all costs (even by turning your back on learning altogether and doing something else, which is what a lot of remedial kids do). Instead, learners can see that errors are not frightening things and the proper understanding and control of them leads to increased competence.

So what's important for the teacher is his or her attitude towards the making of errors, and the way in which that's communicated.

Yes, the teacher's attitude towards approximation and the role of risk taking is important. You see, the interesting thing about successful learners (such as those precocious readers I mentioned earlier) is how, even right from the beginning, they show themselves to be different in their freedom from dependence upon extrinsic rewards — that's not what they're after. And this powerful, positive experience of reinforcement comes, in the acquisition model, through an internal process, which is not dependent upon somebody telling you that you're right or wrong. One of the important differences is that you're not dependent on an audience — again it's one of these reflexive things and it's characterised emotionally by what I call in *The Foundations* the 'aha!' response. The most powerful reinforcer, then, is that experience of when the penny drops, the light comes on and 'aha!'. It's a wonderful experience, and it will often follow having made an error and seeing what the error is, and then 'Oh yes, of course it's that! Oh yes, I get it now!' *That's* the 'aha!' response!

Now if you look at how the 'aha!' experience is produced, it can only come after a reflexive act by the learner: that is, he or she will hypothesise something and then see it in the new light of fitting into a bigger whole created by the hypothesis, and then look at the detail to check. And so it's checked or proved or whatever word you like to use. So this model is EXPLORE, HYPOTHESISE, CHECK, and then I always put in the last place (though nobody else seems to) TRIUMPH — an indication of the 'aha!' response having occurred. And that occurs as a result of step three — of the checking. If that isn't done, then you must go *extrinsically* to find out whether you're right or not. You look outside the act and outside yourself, which means you've got to be dependent. It means you're not going to be able to learn on your own through reading or writing by yourself — all these things which drive the acquisition model. That's why the model is so efficient, because the learner is engaged so much of the time in self-motivated operation and doesn't need extrinsic programming or rewards. The thing is entirely satisfying in itself. It shows up in the research too, you know: Marie Clay showed that the higher the level of self-correction, the more successful the learner of reading was (that was for young learners between the ages of five and eight).

And that's not at all surprising in terms of cognitive learning theory. The critical point at which the learning is reinforced and insured and pressed on to new things is the point of testing. But in the traditional teaching mould that testing was given to teachers to do — the pupils weren't expected to do it, they were even discouraged from doing it. And the more problems you had with learning to read and spell, the more you were corrected. There wasn't any possibility of learning to correct yourself, to process your own errors, and the differential treatment of kids having difficulties was in fact detrimental to them.

One of the important insights here was that anything which stops the checking process from occurring tends to be counter-productive for the learner. And that can often be produced society by false dependence upon the

teacher, or by the act always being performed in a situation which is at least potentially competitive — if there are other kids around, comparisons can be made. What happens in all this learning centred around testing is that self-assurance and self-knowledge and so on are interfered with by competition and by false 'audiencing' where your audience have a role that they shouldn't have. So that when learners are taking control of their own act of reading or writing, then anybody in the environment who acts to usurp their self-correcting role is doing something very counter-productive for the learning. That's not to say that correction can't occur at the appropriate time, but in terms of this central access to self-confidence and self-assurance — what I've called the 'aha!' response — false competition and comparison are just very counter-productive.

For me that final *triumph* feeling of an absolutely inner-motivated reward structure is what's crucial. So that when you've got kids working in that way, you can be absolutely assured that they are going to be rewarded all the time. The kids too soon find that they can look after themselves and get there before the teacher and do their own risk taking, and that *this* is the way they get satisfaction, rather than turning to the teacher for approval and correction. And this, the cognitive side of the model, was really stimulated by my own clinical work. When I was working one-to-one with older kids, I found that once you set up this sample/predict/test/triumph process, it became self-generative and led to that sort of behaviour that I call 'self-improvement'. Then you can give your kids books to take home and read without your help whenever they are motivated to get in (if you've succeeded in motivating them to get in and do a bit of reading themselves) and they're going to learn from it. But if they have to depend on someone else, their mother or someone, to tell them whether they're right or wrong, they won't learn from it.

'False competition and comparison are just very counter-productive.'

Can we return now to your model of acquisition learning? I wonder if you could talk a bit more about the demonstration, that first mode, as it applies to literacy. Because the example you gave of sweeping the floor is of something you can see, and one of the things about literacy — well, take the reading side of it — is that in a skilled adult it's less physically observable.

As a teacher you must be rather better at demonstrating than the ordinary person — that's part of becoming a professional.

So what are the important things for an early childhood teacher to be demonstrating about literacy in, say, the first three years of schooling?

Here's one place where the bed-time story type of situation gives you very clear answers about what's involved in a powerful demonstration. The pressure is not at all on the learner to perform — it's a sharing of pleasure together — and the responsibility for bringing about that pleasure is taken by the teacher, by the skilled person quite fully, and that's what's involved in the demonstration. That most of the work is done by the teacher in that situation is not of concern. The teacher isn't too worried about trying to force responses from the kids, because it's not her role as a demonstrator. Her role is to share this pleasure and to open up herself as a literate person — to embody the complex things going on in her being as a reader and make them palpable. As you say, literacy is a rather covert type of practice; it's got puzzling things for young children to understand as they watch adults read or write. It's not so easy for them to see the thing as a concrete, accomplished act, so one of the problems in teaching language is to make the invisible *visible*, to make the abstract *concrete*, to make the whole thing tangible for the kids — to embody what's going on. In a holistic sense, what you are doing with your whole being, including your body, is very important. You've got to be more lively and outgoing, even dramatic, than you would normally be, because you're trying to convey in a concrete way what the story *means* to you. If you're using an enlarged text and you're moving through the text, you can share with the kids what's going on in your own head . . .

Thinking aloud . . .

Thinking aloud . . . and just about everything that's going on in your head as a reader ought to come out at those times as you're reading — you are sharing the affective and cognitive processes that are going on in your own head. You're bringing them out in the open and verbalising them and talking to the kids about what's happening to you. I've got a reputation for doing this sort of thing — I get called names like 'Merlin' and so on when I'm sharing a story with kids. But of course I'm usually trying to give teachers permission to be more open than they usually are. So I've developed that technique because it provides an opportunity to draw the kids into processes which are sophisticated in their own right. If you want to introduce the notion of reading to yourself, or silent reading, or reading 'happening-in-the-head', it can be done in a demonstration mode, whereas if you just *talk* to the kids about it, it all sounds like gobbledy-gook to them. This is part of the skill of being a teacher and so a good demonstrator — you'll do things that perhaps the parent would never do. That's fair enough; you're paid to be expert at it.

If there's any word that ties up whole language and process teaching and writing process and so on, it's the word 'authentic'. The thing that the teacher must be as a literate person with her pupils is *authentic*. She shares her authentic literacy with them. And that's one reason why she must have the freedom to select from the wide range of material, because the materials which she feels embody her own delights and pleasures most are going to be the materials that she teaches from best — not something that's been published in a program and she has no sympathy for.

The same sort of principle applies to the kids too. You need to have the freedom to introduce a wide variety of material which will be handled at different levels, at different depths, and the kids decide which texts are going to be 'depth' texts — that can't be programmed in, and this is what's going wrong in the published programs. In

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acquisition learning you have to have that freedom to follow the interest and motivation of the learner, particularly in the participant mode when you come to what I call 'hand-in-hand' learning where you're doing things together. And, of course, demonstrations very quickly and naturally become participant — they become 'hand-in-hand' rather than depending entirely on the demonstration of the teacher. Once the text is floated, the kids get in and get hands-on experience of the text straight away. And this is a skill that can be developed too — you have to be able to produce *invitational* tones and modes and procedures in the light of your handling the text, so that you don't just keep the text for yourself as demonstrator and not let the kids into it, but as soon as you feel the appropriate desire for the kids to enter the text and to get hands-on experience, you can make those invitational noises and movements and so on. So you move as rapidly as you can out of demonstration into participation, and in a good shared book experience program, this participant mode would be the mode that the teacher and the kids are in most often.

We did not have the opportunity to discuss in any depth how the different roles within the model transfer to actual classroom situations, or its implications for graphophonic issues (which will be covered in a future PEN). However, there are many examples in Holdaway's published work, listed below, and he has developed the following flow diagrams to indicate in tabular form how the different roles dovetail within classroom settings.

Acquisition Learning Sequence

	Demonstration	Participation	Role-play/practice	Performance
Learners	Observing demonstrations	Participating, questioning	Role-playing, practising	Sharing, performing, displaying competence
Teachers	Displaying reading and writing in genuine ways	Inducing action involvement within the class community	Enabling, supporting, arranging environment, instructing	Accepting, enjoying, monitoring, recording, validating, rewarding

Audience/Spectator Roles

Learner is audience. Teacher is performer in authentic activity.	Learner is participant. Teacher is participant. No true audience.	Learner is self-regulator. Teacher is 'invisible' enabler/supporter. No audience except self.	Learner is performer. Teacher is a special, validating audience.

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